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Cheddar Cheese

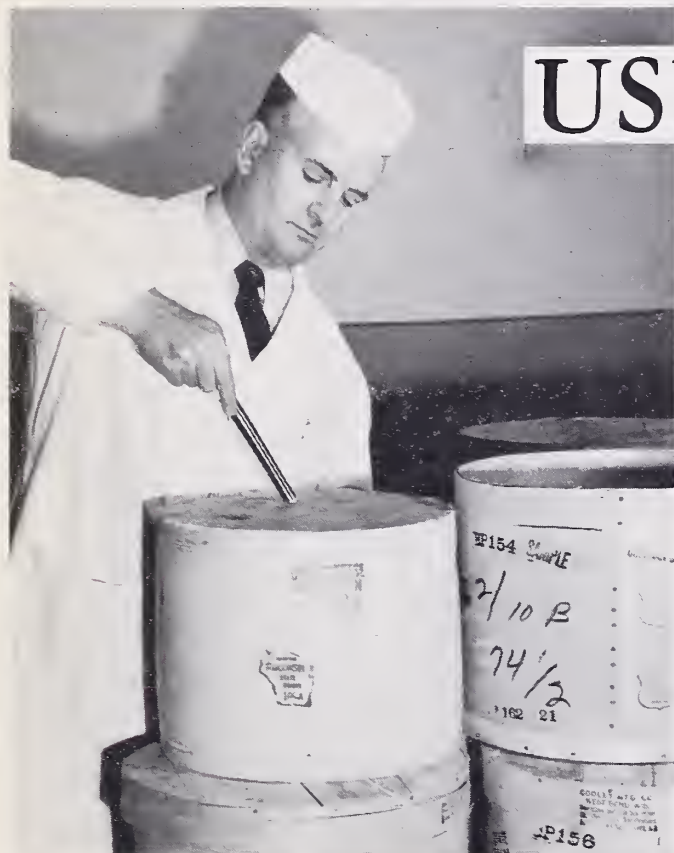
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that earns the

USDA GRADE MARK



N-13039

In grading Cheddar cheese, USDA grader considers such quality factors as flavor, texture, finish and appearance, and color.

Since the earliest days of cheesemaking many centuries ago, cheesemakers have found it difficult to turn out cheese that is consistently uniform in flavor and quality. Today, even the most up-to-date manufacturing plants still face this problem.

For this reason, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has cooperated closely with members of the dairy industry in developing a program that provides for acknowledging those cheese plants that demonstrate ability to turn out Cheddar cheese that meets high standards of dependable flavor and quality in all curing categories.

Under the grade labeling program, those plants that qualify are permitted use of the USDA grade mark—the hallmark of quality—on their consumer packages of Cheddar cheese. To qualify, a plant must first pass a rigid and comprehensive appraisal of its manufacturing operations, made by dairy inspection and grading personnel of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service.



N-42100

The USDA grade shield, along with the particular degree of cure, appears on consumer packages of cheese produced under USDA's quality assurance program.



N-39928

When she sees the USDA grade mark on the package, the food shopper is assured the cheese is of uniform high quality and good flavor.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, Office of Information

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N-28473

Another important step in the making of Cheddar cheese is the "Cheddaring" process. As the sliced blocks of curd are turned over for the first time, some of the whey drains off and a matted curd is left.



N-29028

After the sliced blocks of curd have been stacked and the curd milled into small pieces, salt is added and more of the whey is permitted to drain off.

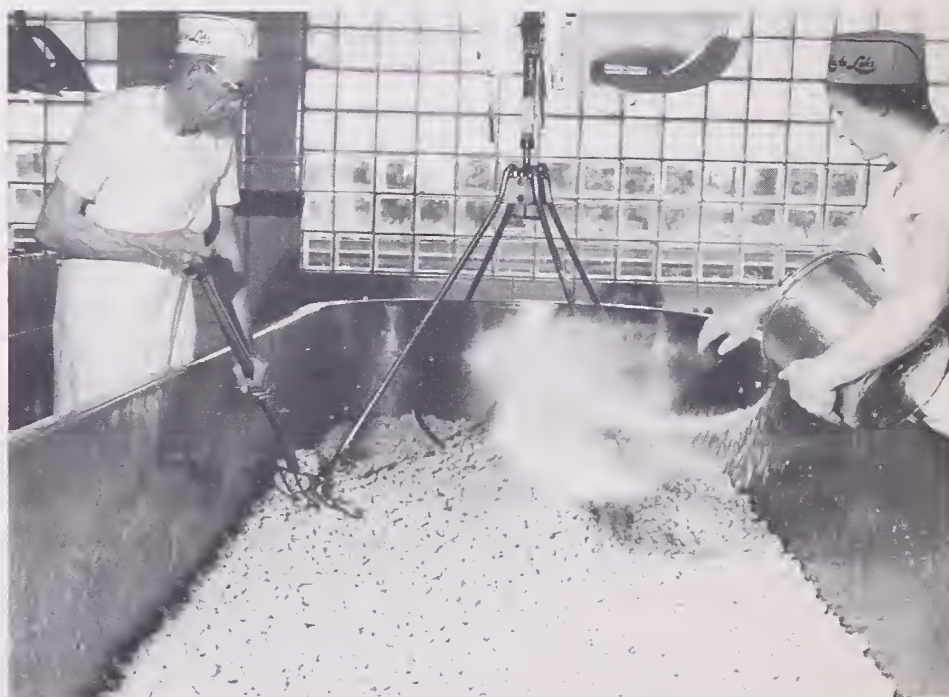
To manufacture Cheddar cheese that earns the USDA grade mark, it is essential that high quality milk be supplied by dairy producers. Most of the milk arrives at the cheese manufacturing plant in 10 gallon cans, with each producer's cans identified by code number. The milk moves by conveyor into the plant, where it will first be graded and poured into a weighing tank.

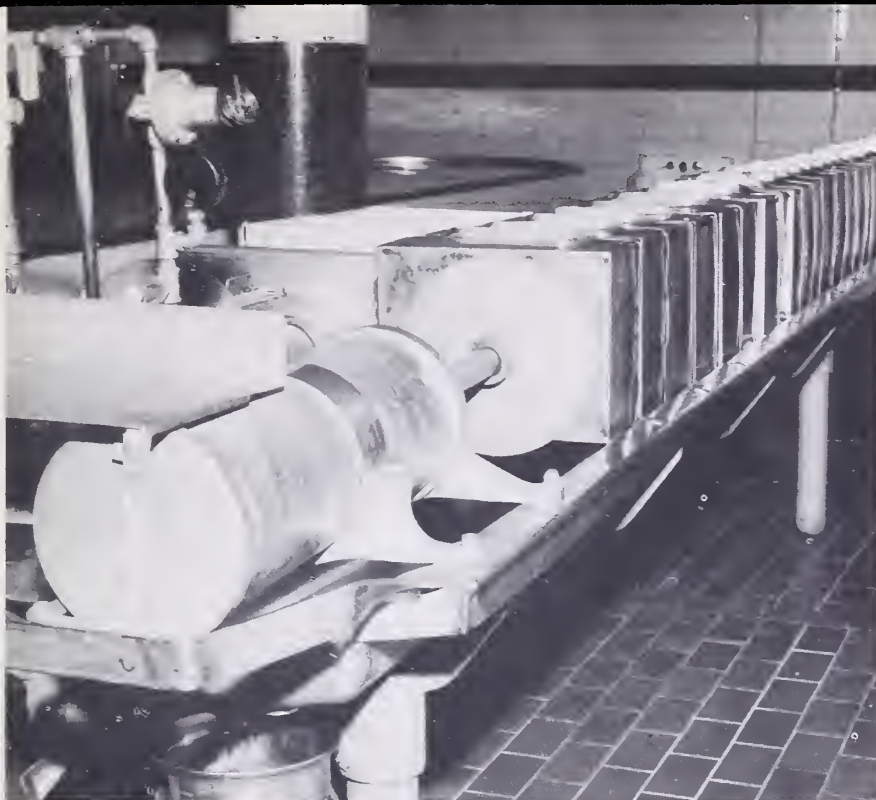
To develop the desired amount of acidity during the making process, a "starter"—containing a culture of lactic acid-producing bacteria—is poured into the vat of milk. Use of a satisfactory starter is required for the production of uniformly high-quality cheese. This is just one of the requirements a manufacturer must meet before being authorized use of USDA's grade labeling program.



N-29027

N-29044





N-29026

Once the salt has dissolved and the whey has drained sufficiently, the curd is weighed and placed in metal "hoops." In the operation shown, pressure is being applied to the "hoops" to remove the remaining whey and result in the desired compactness.

Control of humidity in the cheese drying room is important in producing cheese that will meet USDA quality standards. An inspection of plants operating under the grade labeling program, made quarterly by USDA, includes a check on drying room humidity.



BN-12890



N-28568

Cheddar cheese is cured under controlled temperature and humidity conditions. Depending on the flavor desired—mild, mellow-aged, or sharp—the cheese may remain in the curing room for two to 12 months or more. The particular degree of cure appears on the label of retail packages of cheese produced under USDA's grade labeling program.



N-29052

To the extent necessary, a plant working toward qualification under the grade labeling program is offered the assistance of a USDA dairy laboratory. Technicians are available at the laboratory to analyze samples of cheese and to make suggestions for improvements in "make" techniques.



Growth Through Agricultural Progress



BN-12881

TOP: Steps toward qualification for use of the grade labeling program include passing of a thorough plant inspection made by USDA dairy personnel. This inspector is checking the condition of a milk can. Cans in poor condition can adversely affect the flavor of the milk used in making cheese.

BN-12883

CENTER: The plant inspection involves a check on some 120 items. To learn whether proper hygienic measures are being employed, an inspector will, for instance, disassemble and check a milk pump.

BN-12886

BOTTOM: Milk pipelines are taken apart and checked for sanitation as part of the plant inspection. Once a plant is approved to use the USDA grade mark on consumer packages of cheese, the plant inspection is continued on a quarterly basis.



N-37072



N-33720

As part of the overall plant appraisal, USDA graders will make frequent visits to grade cheese at a manufacturing plant that is working toward approval for use of the cheese grade labeling program. They will make visits over a period long enough to determine whether the plant can consistently manufacture cheese of uniformly high quality and good flavor, in accordance with the U. S. standards for the grade under which it is to be packaged.

Each vat of cheese to be packaged under the USDA grade mark is officially graded at the time of packaging by a Federally-licensed dairy products grader. USDA provides grading service to cheese factories on a voluntary basis.



BN-14529

Cheddar cheese carrying the USDA Grade AA shield—of highest quality—has a fine, highly pleasing flavor, with a smooth compact texture and uniformly attractive appearance. Although USDA Grade A cheese rates second to the top grade, it has a pleasing flavor, a reasonably compact texture, and a uniformly attractive appearance. Two lower USDA grades, for which standards also exist, are B and C.